

Interview with Fr. Ted Skalsky, January 1st, 2015, Meade, Kansas

Italics: Anne Shaughnessy

Bold: Bernadette

Regular: Ted

Think back to when you were my age. What decade was it?

I graduated from high school in '64, so it would have been in the early part of the sixties. I gra—well between '60 and '64 that was when I was in high school, so sophomore year would have been in '62.

Okay. Where were you living at that time?

Lived in Belpre, went to high school in Windhorst.

So you lived, you did, so in high school you were living with the Torlines?

Every week I would go to the Torlines, every Monday I'd go home every Friday.

Who was living with you?

Well, at home, it would have been Nancy and Mom and Dad. Yeah, everyone else was gone.

Kinda like me—just me and Ambrose!

What about the Torlines?

Oh, yeah! What about the Torlines?

At the Torlines, well the first year there was Lornie Wolf, and Thelma, the three of us. Then Thelma graduated, and then so my sophomore year it was Lornie and I, and I think maybe his sister, Cathy. I think that was the year she came. I think that lasted two years and then the Wolfs left and so that last year I was there alone.

So the Torlines were just a couple who just...

It was a family; they weren't even married. They were just brothers and sisters who...

Oh, okay. Yeah, yeah, I knew that. Um, okay. What classes did you take?

Oh, I took, obviously English, and American History, and, shop—I liked that class.

Um, I took math courses, algebra and geometry, Latin—a disaster!

[laugh]

No, actually I did okay in it, but it was a disaster later because it messed me up when I got into the seminary because I got off schedule. Um, what else would I have taken?

Science courses?

Uh, chemistry, biology, um government.

Was it a Catholic school or...

Well, sort of! [laughs]

[laughs] Sort of?

It was actually a public school, but, but Msgr. Stremmel was the principal and the nuns taught it.

[laughs] So, um, what other activities did you do?

Football, baseball, oh, I did baseball a couple years, basketball for a couple years.

Um, I was a member of Student Council; um, those are the main things I think.

Did Grandma and Grandpa ever come watch you play your games?

Oh, maybe once or twice. Wasn't too often. But you know that wasn't the thing then.

You didn't—I mean if-if the games were home games, people would come. But they didn't travel with the team much. A few would, but you didn't expect your parents to come.

How big was Windhorst?

There were 59 of us in the high school [laughs].

[laughs]

I had the largest class ever to graduate the high school.

So you had 59 in your grade?

No. We were 19. [laughs]

Oh! [laughs]

So, did they have religion classes?

Yeah, we had religion in the morning—early in the morning. And, uh, the way it worked was the school district rented the school from the parish, beginning at a certain time every morning, and ending every night. And so, what went on between those hours couldn't be religion. But at night we would do all sort- you know- have our um-our, um, what do you call it? You know, religion group.

Youth group?

Yeah, whatever kind of youth group you call it. I forget what it was.

That's a handy thing!

It was quite an arrangement. But it worked!

Is it legal now? [laughs]

I imagine, you could still probably get away with that.

I think so. Baileyville, I think had something similar, or at least before they combined with Seneca.

Were you involved in other church or community activities?

Not too much, because I was never, I was always, gone during the week or gone during the weekend. Um, I quit Boy Scouts because I was never around for the meetings. Um, you know, I was involved in things at the school. But I don't remember what they were exactly. There weren't that many activities, you know? Mostly sports and-and I did speech and that kind of drama. I did that. I took, uh, I think I went to state, I think; it was an extemporatory. No, it was uh, can't think what it was called. I did an informative speech. Oh, I did a, I did a speech on the Berlin Wall. And I quoted Robert Frost, "There something is who doesn't love a wall."

That's a good line there!

And it was just, you know, the whole thing was about the Berlin Wall. And my last year—that was the most interesting year. It was extemporatory speaking and the what you would have to do is you'd go to these speech debates and they'd give you a topic, and then you'd have so many minutes to prepare your speech. And of course, you had to be prepared for all sorts of topics

Yeah.

But I had a nun, that was, I mean, it was like getting briefed by her everyday. I mean she-she would read all these articles that she would give us to read about *U.S. News* and *Time*, and uh, and I'd have to read those and get ready for those, for those debates.

Wow. Was that like—When did the Berlin Wall Fall?

Oh, it didn't fall till the nineties, did it?

Oh, so this was just...

It was relatively—it was relatively new yet.

Oh, okay.

I mean not really, but...

I was thinking, okay, 'cause they built it like right after World War II, a few years after World War—

A few years after World War II. I don't know when the wall exactly went up.

So it was like a current event.

Oh, it was a very current event back then. Yeah, see I was in high school during the Cuban Missile Crisis--which is when they thought we almost went to nuclear war with Russia over missiles in Cuba.

Do you remember having, like, nuclear drills?

I remember talking about one. I don't know if we ever had one. But we had a place in the school where you would go in case there was a nuclear event.

Like, 'cause like I've heard of people going under desks or something like that--holding their head?

No, we never did that.

I don't know what it'd help, cover your face with a newspaper! Okay?

We had what they were shelters, and, uh, they were kind of in the basements and places like that and, uh, I remember, you know, having a video or a movie they showed us on, uh, you know how you would if you had to live in this shelter, how you'd live, uh, what you would eat and a lot of places had rations stored.

Oh, okay.

They were like canned rations. In case of a nuclear war you'd have something to eat.

Till you have to go outside. How did you get around, and where did you go?

Well, I had a 1950--no, yeah, it was a 1954 Ford that I drove.

Was that a truck or a car or?

Car! It was a car.

Where did you go?

Belpre to Windhorst, and Windhorst to Belpre [laughs]

[laughs]

[laughs]

One of my more exciting adventures was my sophomore year at Thanksgiving. I drove to Fowler and picked up your grandmother.

Ohhh.

She was teaching in Fowler that year,

Oh, okay, yeah, she told us about that.

And she didn't have a car and so I went and picked her up and brought her to Belpre and I think that's when your grandpa came to visit.

[laughs] While you were gone?

Well, I think he got there before Kay did! I'm not sure that's the exact time. I'm thinking it was though.

How was that being driven home by—I mean, I can imagine John getting rides from me, like I having to go pick up John. 'Cause I'm a sophomore and he would be about the same age Grandma would have been. But like...

John would have probably driven once you would have been there.

But, once you got there, would you just keep driving?

Oh I don't remember. I presume I did but I don't know.

But being the guy, it was different.

Oh, yeah that's true.

Yeah, I suspect—and those times in particular guys did a lot more—girls didn't drive quite as much as guys did.

Where did you hang out with your friends? Did you hang out?

Well, just at school mostly. 'Cause I was always home on weekends so you never did much on weekends.

Oh, yeah.

Yeah, so during school. And you know, if there were ballgames or we had—oh, whatever you call it. We would meet once a month and of course there was stuff people didn't know about! [laughs]

[laughs] Now's your chance!

You know we had a place and I don't think I was only there once, but, um, there's a place—it was just an intersection cut off—like a place where you could drive off into the field and they called it "Little Germany," and that's where they would drink beer!

[laughs]

[laughs]

They would go out there and drink beer!

Was it, was it 18 then or did they even have a drinking age?

Eighteen, yeah for beer.

It wasn't too hard then for high school seniors.

Then 21 for hard liquor.

Oh, okay. I didn't realize there was a distinction. Um, did you have a job?

On the farm.

Um, what did you do for fun? Besides going to Little Germany?

[laughs] Well, it was all tied up—basically—with school. In summertime you know I always had an interest in making things or so I remember refinishing furniture—I remember tearing down an old motor off of a combine just to see what it was made of—like because I didn't know anything about motors so I wanted to know. Um, but, and Paul, when Paul was home—I'm trying to remember when that would have been. I guess maybe when he was in high school and I—I don't know. We used to go—we would get together with Mike Hammeke, who would have been like a relative of the Torlines and we would go to Larned sometimes—just spend the evening talking—I remember one night just sitting out on the riverbank talking. We didn't do any fishing we just—

--just talked. Yeah, if you fish, you have to clean fish! Um, what did you do on dates?

Went on a date! [laughs]

Well, there's different kinds of dates like movie theaters, I don't know!

Oh, we mostly danced—like prom and—I didn't date very often—very little—I took, I took, um, well you know her—Betty Conrady—I took her to the junior prom and then I took her sister Kay to the senior prom.

Was the divide in the high school, 'cause if there's 59 people in the high school—was it like pretty evenly split between girls and guys or...?

Uh, there were more girls.

Oh! Good statistic for you! [laughs!]

Well, the funny one was Dave Tasset. There was three girls in the school that he was not related to.

Oh! [laughs]

He married one of them! [laughs] And they're still together! You know there has not been a divorce yet in my class? Not one of them are divorced.

They must be doing something right there at Windhorst!

I think there's had one or two who've had some rough goes, but they're still together.

That's awesome.

And I think we only have one that's dead! Yeah, and I buried him.

So you guys are still like—you still get together and stuff?

We got together this summer for our fiftieth anniversary.

That's impressive.

Not everybody was there. Diane didn't make it. Diane was Dave Tasset's twin sister. And she lives out in California. That's the only one who could come. And then Larry Interman who lives in Dodge, but he was injured in a fall—and so he's in a wheel chair. And for whatever reason he didn't come.

There were only two that didn't make it?

As far as I know.

Wow. That's good! So did a lot of people stay local then?

Oh, some. But there's a lot that are not. Oh, there's another one dead. Beverly-- Beverly Hornung was dead. She was a Conrady from Cimarron. Her husband had been the sheriff for a while. And then he died too of cancer and then she died after him.

Okay.

Oh, um, I forgot what I was thinking. Oh, after school, did a lot of people go to college or just get married right away or?

Well, there was some of both. Um, I think Dave went to mechanics school. I don't know what Norb did—Some of the guys just-just got jobs right away. 'Cause they weren't very academically oriented. Um, like Rosanne went to nurse's training. Some of them went to college.

Um, did most of the people just marry their high school sweethearts or whatever you call it?

Oh, not necessarily.

Oh, I was just thinking of Dave Tasset 'cause...

No, that's really probably the only one that I can think of right now.

Um, what was your method of communication? We text...

Telephone.

Telephone?

But, you know, you didn't use it that often.

You still wrote letters, right?

Yeah, you would write, but you know among each other we never wrote letters.

Right.

We would call some, but basically you didn't talk that much until you saw each other. I mean, there were party lines and...

Oh, so you learned to say...

Course I was not living at home, so I didn't want to use the phone that much. I would use it some, but it was pretty minimal. Um, and then when I was home it was long distance so there was no point in, you know, I don't think I ever called anybody from home, from Belpre.

Yeah. crazy.

No, it's just different! [laughs]

[laughs]

Very different!

Very different!

But, you know, even like in, in college, if I called home once or twice a semester that was it.

I was going to say, I never, it was long distance. Long distance cost you money, not like nowadays.

Yeah, it was kind of expensive. So when you called, you, you made sure you had a reason and you knew what you wanted to talk about. And basically I just called to make arrangements to come home. You know, where are they going to meet you.

Um, who was your president?

You mean of the United States?

Yeah

John Kennedy. He was shot my senior year.

Do you remember where you heard about that?

Oh, I remember we were in school. I don't remember what exactly I was at. But what I do remember is, we found out about it when we were getting ready for play practice. And, uh, so we walked over to the gym where the stage was at and told Sister Rosalind, and she had a bad heart, and I thought I killed her. I mean I told her that John Kennedy was shot and she turned around, laid her head on the stage, and I just didn't know if she was going to come back or not.

Oh, wow.

I was scared.

I killed my teacher.

[laughs]

President's dead, and my teacher's dead too!

Oh my gosh.

She was really, probably the best teacher I ever had. She was, um, just, um, you know, she was energetic, um, you know she was always challenging you to—she always had more to do than you could do. And my kind of motto was you spent—you did all the other work you had to do and then whatever time you had left you gave to her classes! But she—she was very challenging.

Which subjects did she teach?

English.

Oh, okay.

And speech. So she was the one who helped me with the extemporaneous speaking.

Um, what was happening in the news? Did you watch the news?

I read it. I didn't watch television much. Um, on weekends I probably did. Well, that would have been the Civil Rights Era. So, you know, Martin Luther King was active then. Um, that's, you know things were going on in Alabama. Um, the Cuban missile crisis was going on. We still had all the Cold War stuff going on. Um, and then you had Kennedy shot and Lyndon Johnson taking over.

I know you read the news because you were in the class with the drama or whatever. But did you ever talk about it—did they ever talk about it at home or with your friends?

Oh, yeah. Oh yeah. And it kind of depended who it was. Um, I think I probably talked about it more with the girls than I did with the guys. You know like, I, I was pretty close to Rosanne, and, um, somewhat Diane, and I think we would talk some about it. I was in a group where the guys weren't too academically oriented. So, I was I was the only one who really went on to four-year college out of the guys.

Huh. Um, how did the prices compare to today?

Well, it was just much cheaper. Of course, you know, you couldn't, I remember the first time I earned two dollars an hour baling hay. And that was, unbelievably high.

What was normal pay?

Well, usually you were getting a dollar, a dollar and a half. But you know kind of you know things have gone up. Oh, and I got two dollars an hour—we helped some neighbor bale hay. Um, but you know I would go to school, sometimes with hardly any money in my pocket for the whole week. And, you didn't need it. You know, fill up with gas at home and then, um, there were, we could buy candy bars and stuff at school, but we didn't.

Did they have like vending machines or?

Oh, they had just a little counter, um, you know, a snack bar type of thing. I guess it was at noon hour or something. They would sell candy bars or something.

Made money for something.

I don't think there were any vending machines that I remember.

I didn't know when they came in.

Well, you know, Coke machines were around, but we didn't have any that I remember. Of course, then it was all bottles yet, too. It was before cans came out.

So, what was your favorite treat? Like, today, if I got something to drink, I'd get lemonade and a Snickers, or something, what would you get?

Oh, we would have got a Coke or Pepsi, candy bar. Hot dogs were really popular too, like for sporting events. Yeah, they would sell hot dogs.

That hasn't gone out of style!

No.

Um, did you watch movies?

Very rare. I guess I went to a couple of movies. Yeah, I remember, a drive-in. I can't remember what it was.

Do you remember your favorite songs that were popular during the sixties?

Hmmm. I remember one I always laughed at. Cause I remember "The Lazy Crazy Days of Summer, the days of sodas and pretzels and beer." Um, it was a song about the lazy days of summer and it was the summer that Paul was not home; he was in the military, and Dad had hurt his back, and so it was not a lazy—[laughs]

[laughs]

[laughs] Not a good summer, huh!

Well, I just worked hard, that's all! I worked really hard that summer.

What were your favorite dances?

I have no idea! [laughs]

[laughs]

[laughs]

We waltzed, and that's really all I can remember. Maybe a little bit of the polka. Uh, and I think we did the Mexican hat dance. I think we did that. [shrugs shoulders]

I'm curious, and this is kind of an earlier topic, but how much did the Torlines charge for you to stay.

A dollar a day. And we always teased them how rich they were getting; of course we knew they weren't but [laughs]...

[laughs] So did they pay for food?

Yeah. Yeah, they didn't make any money off of us. [laughs]

So they just did it because they enjoyed having young people around? Or what?

I think they did it because they thought it was a help to people. And, you know, maybe they did enjoy having young people, I don't know. You know, I was too young to think, worry about how they felt.

Right.

Um, you know, I think it probably supported the school, and they wanted to do that. Brought kids to the school.

Probably kept the school open.

Yeah. And, we would help there. Milk cows there or feed chickens or things like that.

Um, what were hair styles like, what were clothes like?

I remember I had a flat top--which I couldn't do today [indicates bald head]!

Oh! [laughs]

Um, you know, the Beatles came in right at the end of my high school, my last year and that's when things began to change. Suddenly, you know, they came with long hair and then long hairstyles became popular. Um, clothing? We were not allowed to wear jeans to school. We had to wear dress pants.

Oh!

Um, that changed while I was there, I mean there were jeans and then they said no. just dress pants, couldn't wear jeans.

Wow.

Um, you know, I don't know, just clothes.

Did you hear news about the Korean War? What'd you think about it?

The Korean War, see that was gone by that time.

Oh, so...

I would have been younger. I don't know exactly when, that ended in, I don't know, '52? Somewhere in there.

Oh, okay.

I remember. I remember as a little bitty guy first, third grade, somewhere in that area that there was a war going on. But I didn't really have any sense of where it was.

Paul went to Korea, later?

But that was later. That was after the war.

Okay. Was it the Vietnam War?

That started my first year in college. Well, it, I remember reading my senior year in the paper that President Kennedy had sent some military advisors or something into Vietnam. And that was really what began it, but the whole thing did not really break until my freshman year in college. And of course, by that time I had a draft deferment as a seminary student.

Oh.

And um, so you know, it never was an issue in my life.

Yeah, so you know, the draft lottery and stuff like that?

Yeah, I wasn't a part of that.

Okay, umm.

But I remember hiding, we had—and I wasn't a part of this; it was the older guys that did this, but there was a guy who was a draft—dodging the draft, and he hid in the seminary for a while [laughs]. I don't know if the faculty knew it or not. I have no idea!

Oh, he was just in the dorms or whatever.

Yeah, they just had him in the dorms. It wasn't too long, maybe a month—less than a month I think.

[laughs] Wow!

And farmers, farmers didn't get drafted?

Oh, yeah.

They were?

Yeah.

There was a time that they weren't.

I think that was more during World War Two. Um, cause Dave Tasset got drafted.

Do you remember hippies?

Oh yeah.

They were just...

I don't know exactly what year that would have started, but they just, it would have been after The Beatles I think. And that was really quite a turning event, The Beatles. Um, you know that really changed the culture very quickly. Because you know, clothing styles changed, hairstyles changed, drugs began to come in about then. I mean there was a few drugs. I remember I was probably maybe eighth grade or so, there was a news program on television, and I remember the news commentator, there was a report about a party he said that I hope your children or my children never go to. And it was a heroin party.

Oh..

In New York. And that was the first we even heard of drugs. But then, by you know, through the—after The Beatles and through the Vietnam War drugs became quite common.

Um, do you remember war protests?

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

In Kansas, or?

Oh I don't know, I was never close to one. But I remember them.

Um, do you remember the fall of Saigon?

Oh, yeah. You know, it was very distant so, I think I was ordained already at that point. Um, but we knew it was happening. The other thing I remember is the Watergate Trials.

Oh.

I remember her [Anne's] dad watching; he was very absorbed in that.

Um, I know it came out slowly with those two reporters, but when did it start coming really, 'cause now I hear about it and it's like it was big news from the start, but I know it couldn't have been.

Well, you know, you just heard about a robbery at this place called Watergate. And then it gradually, you know reporters began to investigate it and found out who was behind it, and then, uh, you it just kind of started picking up. Oh, as President Nixon you know, got more and more connected to it. That was, that was an interesting time.